

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE C7

WASHINGTON POST
29 June 1986

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Kowtowing to Khomeini

Syrian involvement in anti-American terrorism is at last getting some press attention. But there has been a strange silence about the other major source of terror: Iran.

Stranger still is the willingness of two powerful victims of Iranian terrorism—the United States and France—to seek accommodation with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the hope of appeasing his fanatical hatred of the West. Kowtowing to Khomeini has become the new diplomatic game in Washington and Paris.

This is irony of truly staggering proportions. If any victims of Khomeini should realize the futility of trying to do business with him, it's France and the United States. It was terrorists inspired and directed by Khomeini who slaughtered 59 French paratroopers and 241 U.S. Marines on a single day in 1983 at the Beirut airport. And it is Khomeini's terrorist chieftains who kidnapped French and American hostages and were still holding them last week despite appeasement gestures by the French and U.S. governments. We can reveal that the secret negotiations over arms supply and release of American hostages have involved members of the National Security Council and a former official of the CIA.

Meanwhile, the French have gone a step further. While still continuing to sell arms to Iraq, they have quietly begun to sell to Iran as well.

In a shameless act of appeasement, the French government also forced out of its country the Iranian exile with the best chance of overthrowing Khomeini: Massoud Rajavi, head of the People's Mojahedin.

Given our druthers, Rajavi would not be the first choice to replace Khomeini. He has been shrilly anti-Western in the past, and advocates a suspiciously extremist philosophy that might be called "Islamic Socialism."

But Rajavi has pledged to hold free elections within six months after he ousts Khomeini, and a Mojahedin official told us the Iranians who support Rajavi would insist that he keep his promise even if he tried not to. "Democracy is all that is left for them," the official explained, noting moderate Iranians' cruel disappointment when the corrupt dictatorship of the shah was succeeded by the fanatic fundamentalism of Khomeini.

Whatever the true nature of Rajavi's ideology, one thing is clear: he seems to be the only one who can mobilize significant opposition to Khomeini inside Iran. The Mojahedin claim to have mounted more than 200 antigovernment demonstrations within Iran in the last year. They have a videotape showing the "commencement exercise" of 2,000 guerrillas in Iranian Kurdistan last October.

While such claims are difficult to check out in Khomeini's Iran, the ayatollah's wrathful response to the Mojahedin's opposition has

indirectly confirmed Rajavi's claims that he is a serious threat to the regime. Many of the tens of thousands of Iranians Khomeini has had executed were Mojahedin members. And while Khomeini showed little concern about other opponents who are in exile in France, he has been adamant in his demands that the French turn Rajavi over to him.

"The [Mojahedin] are a criminal group whose hands are stained with the blood of our people's dearest children," an official message fulminated last April 15. "If the French wish to change their attitude towards Iran, they must uproot the [Mojahedin] bases. . . . Throw the [Mojahedin] out of your country! . . . It is only then that our people will believe that France is a friendly country."

With the French hostages in Lebanon in mind, France capitulated and forced Rajavi to leave "voluntarily" several weeks ago. He found refuge in Iraq, much to the chagrin of Iranian officials. They had something entirely different planned: Rajavi's arrest by Interpol during a brief layover in Switzerland, followed by his extradition to Iran.

The French ameliorated the shame of their expulsion of Rajavi by telling him of Tehran's plan and allowing him to get a direct flight to Iraq. Weeks later, kowtowing to Khomeini had brought the release of only two of nine French hostages.

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